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ABSTRACT

Planning in higher education has evolved as a response to changes in the environment, such as expanding enrollments, student unrest, economic recession, and pressures for financial accountability. Strategic planning has emerged as one way institutions can handle and overcome the adversities of the future. Definitions of strategic planning are presented. Strategic planning is characterized as an ongoing, pro-active, research-based, prioritized, situational process employing the systems approach, considering the external environment, promoting optimization and financial vitality, developing links to budgeting, and involving evaluation. Strategic planning is beneficial in that it can provide: a conceptual framework for decision making, a better intra-institutional understanding and cooperation among campus constituents, a means for institutions to cope with and survive the turbulent environment ahead, a means for rethinking institutional missions, a more comprehensive and pro-active approach to decision making, improvement in campus community morale, and improvement in institutional image. Six pitfalls in strategic planning, such as overemphasizing quantitative data and theories, and five good approaches, such as involving a good representation of the campus community in the planning process, are described. The paper concludes with a model of strategic planning and 13 references. (JDD)

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STRATEGIC PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: VARYING DEFINITIONS, KEY CHARACTERISTICS, BENEFITS, PITFALLS, AND GOOD APPROACHES

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Abstract

Strategic planning is said to have evolved as a response to changing environmental conditions. It is a relatively new phenomenon on many college campuses, and its definitions have been varied. Despite the lack of a common definition, we know that strategic planning has some unique characteristics which differentiate it from other forms of planning. This article gives an overview of some of these characteristics. In addition, some benefits of strategic planning, some common pitfalls, and some good approaches to strategic planning are discussed. Strategic planning may be one of a few remaining ways institutions can employ to manage effectively the adversities of the future.

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: VARYING DEFINITIONS, KEY CHARACTERISTICS, BENEFITS, PITFALLS, AND GOOD APPROACHES

Introduction

Planning in higher education for the past three decades can be said to have evolved as a response to changes in the environment. The 1950s and 1960s were an era of great expansion for higher education or or what some have called the "golden age of higher education." To meet this challenge, many institutions developed plans to deal with student enrollment increases, facilities construction, expansion of academic programs, proliferation of administrative structures, and prudent financial allocation and management. Long-range planning, master planning, contingency planning, systematic planning, program planning and budgeting system (PPBS), and program evaluation review technique (PERT) were popular planning practices during this time period (Winstead and Ruff, 1986).

After the student unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s, enrollments and emotions had stabilized but worse was yet to come. The economic recession of the mid-1970s forced many institutions for the first time to develop immediate plans to deal with problems of declining financial resources. Cut-backs in the scope of operations, deferred building maintenance, faculty retrenchment, resource reallocation, and staff and program reduction were viable planning options in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Outside pressures for financial accountability were mounting. Management by objectives (MBO), zero-based budgeting, and futures research became common planning practices (Winstead and Ruff, 1986).

The conditions of the 1980s had not been that much different from the decade before. Student enrollments in most institutions had not increased; neither had financial resources. Tuition prices however had to be raised, often higher than the rate of inflation by many institutions. Governments, students, and their families had borne the extra costs. Pressures for financial accountability and institutional efficiency continued forcing many institutions to deal with the long-term effects of limited growth and continuing financial constraints. Futures research remained as a way of detecting environmental changes and lessening the time it would otherwise take to respond to them. The use of "quality circles" (that is the voluntary involvement of faculty, staff, and sometimes students into decision making) had also been introduced as a means of maintaining morale and improving some aspects of institutional practices in an otherwise period of flux. A more comprehensive form of planning was needed, and strategic planning emerged.

The 1990s are expected to be a difficult decade for higher education. As a result of more turbulent conditions in the environment, some experts predict that between 10-30 percent of America's colleges and universities could close down by the middle of the 1990s. Glenny and Schmidtlein (1983) listed a few of these adversities. One, fear of declining student enrollment would likely prevent institutions from implementing exactly what they would need to do in order to survive, such as raising admissions standards or introducing some other quality enhancement measures. Two, continuing financial constraints and difficulty in resource reallocation would likely prevent the development of new or innovative academic programs necessary for continued survival. And three, higher unemployment, labor shortages, and market conditions of the 1990s would likely result in the proliferation of popular academic or career-oriented curricula further deteriorating the liberal arts curriculum in many colleges. Adding to this list, Keller (1983) in his best-selling book, *Academic Strategy,* warns of six major forces facing higher education in the decades ahead: (1) the age, ethnic background, and matriculation behaviors of students will be different, (2) the traditional liberal arts curriculum will be further disintegrated, (3) competition within higher education for students and minority faculty will increase, (4) traditional higher education practices will change due to technological advances and imperatives, (5) the age of the faculty and the way they are compensated will change, and (6) external control and regulation of institutions by state governments and other related agencies will become tighter.

In order to better deal with such adversities, Keller (1983) warns that the laissez-faire style of management may no longer be effective and would need to be replaced with strategic planning. Since that call to action by Keller, strategic planning in its various forms has been introduced and practiced on many college campuses. Strategic planning remains as one of a few ways institutions can employ to handle and overcome the adversities of the future. Amidst its potential importance, strategic planning remains a confusing concept.

The Varying Definitions of Strategic Planning

Part of the confusion can be attributed to the fact that strategic planning is relatively new. Because

it is new, it has not only taken on varying forms on college campuses, its definition has been varied as well. Here are some examples.

Keller (1983) writes that strategic planning "looks outward and is focused on keeping the institution in step with the changing environment" (p. 145). In the foreword of Keller's book, Cyert (1983) states that strategic planning is an attempt "to give organizations antennae to sense the changing environment" (p. vii). The external environment is the key ingredient in both definitions.

Cope (1987) writes that strategic planning is "an open systems approach to steering an enterprise over time through uncertain environmental waters. It is a pro-active problem-solving behavior directed externally at conditions in the environment and a means to find a favorable competitive position in the continual competition for resources. Its primary purpose is to achieve success with mission while linking the institution's future to anticipated changes in the environment in such a way that the acquisition of resources (money, personnel, staff, students, good will) is faster than the depletion of resources" (p. 3). The external environment is also emphasized here. In addition, it is suggested that strategic planning should employ the systems approach, is pro-active, deals with establishing a competitive edge, and is concerned with the effective use of financial resources.

Peterson (1986) writes that planning is "a conscious process by which an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment, identifies possible future states for itself, and then develops organizational strategies, policies, and procedures for selecting and getting to one or more of them" (p. 114). Peterson further explains that strategic planning is comprised of (1) environmental assessment or scanning, (2) institutional assessment, (3) institutional values assessment; and (4) master plan creation.

Robinson and associates (1978) state that planning is "a continuing exercise in relatively systematic, explicit thinking about the future and ordering of priorities and resources for realizing some preferred state in the future . . . The future . . . may be determined by assessing probable external conditions and their relative consequences for the institution and trying to do better than chance would predict in influencing the internal factors that affect the future" (p. 2). Along a somewhat similar vein, Winstead and Ruff (1986) state that strategic planning is "a continuous and systematic look at an organization, focusing on organizational strengths and weaknesses; assessing the environment in which the organization is competing; and making policy decisions that will position the organization advantageously within its environment" (p. 40). In both definitions, the external environment is again emphasized. There is also a need to assess an institution's strengths and weaknesses and to choose a preferred future state by striking a balance between institutional strengths and the external environment. In addition, strategic planning is said to include the process of setting priorities and implementing programs to achieve chosen institutional goals.

Shirley (1988) writes that colleges and universities are beginning to "plan strategically--that is, the need to articulate clearly a vision for the future and to specify the means by which the vision is to be realized. This vision should seek to develop the optimal relationship between institutional capabilities and values, on the one hand, and environmental needs and opportunities, on the other" (p. 5). Not referring specifically to strategic planning in higher education, management theorist Drucker (1980) writes that the primary tasks of strategic management are "to understand the environment, define organizational goals, identify options, make and implement decisions, and evaluate actual performance. Thus, strategic planning aims to exploit the new and different opportunities of tomorrow, in contrast to long-range planning, which tries to optimize for tomorrow the trends of today" (p. 61). These definitions clearly suggest the future-orientation of strategic planning. As mentioned before, strategic planning also includes the process of balancing institutional strengths with changing environmental conditions, of choosing clear institutional visions, of implementing programs to achieve institutional goals, and of evaluating the extent of institutional accomplishments.

A more in-depth discussion of strategic planning is presented by Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984). According to the authors, traditional planning in its most elementary form is comprised of four steps: (1) monitoring selected trends of interest to the organization, (2) forecasting the expected future of those trends (usually based on extrapolation from historical information), (3) goal setting in the context of expected future, and (4) implementing specific policies and actions designed to reduce the difference between expected future and desired future, and monitoring the effects of these actions and policies on the selected trends (1984, p. 10). The second part of Item 4 should be classified as a separate step. A missing dimension of planning, as Morrison et al. quickly pointed out, is environmental scanning. Environmental scanning, according to the authors, is comprised of four additional steps: (1) scanning the environment for emerging issues that pose threats or opportunities to the organization, (2) evaluating and ranking the nature and degree of its impact on the organization if it should become a reality, (3) forecasting which focuses on developing an understanding of the expected future for the most important issues and trends, and (4)

monitoring, which means to track each issue relative to its continued relevance or its major departure from the forecasts made in the preceding step.

Merging environment scanning with traditional planning, Morrison et al. (1984) proposed their own strategic planning model, in which there are at least six distinct components, namely (1) environmental scanning, (2) evaluation of issues, (3) forecasting, (4) goal setting, (5) implementation, and (6) monitoring. The model, according to the authors, allows for the contrast between "the future that happens to the institution" and "the future that happens for the institution." The former expression refers to situations in which an institution is merely reacting to the changing environments using crisis management or "fire-fighting" techniques. In contrast, the latter refers to situations in which the institution anticipates problems and deals with them before they emerge. Essentially, the idea is that strategic planning should be more pro-active (as opposed to more reactive) and that scanning the external environment is an important part of that process.

Key Characteristics of Strategic Planning

From the above discussion, it appears that almost anyone can come up with his or her own definition of strategic planning. Whether a common definition can be achieved or even necessary may not be important as long as some key ingredients of strategic planning are included. There are at least thirteen of them. Before listing them, it is important to note that the main difference between strategic planning and other forms of planning is that the former is focused on both the internal and external environments of an institution whereas the latter are focused primarily on the internal environment only. In this sense, strategic planning is the more encompassing concept. The internal environment is comprised of elements within an institution, such as its traditions, culture, people, financial resources, and facilities. The external environment, on the other hand, is comprised of elements outside the institution, such as demographic shifts, changes in the composition and size of the traditional college-age cohort, accreditation expectations, and shifts in economic, political, legal, and societal conditions or factors. Obviously, the nature and impact of both environments vary with each institution. Here are a few key characteristics of strategic planning.

Strategic Planning is Situational. Because colleges and universities in the United States are so diverse in their traditions, missions, student clientele, financial support, and organizational set-up and in the way they react to changing environmental conditions, it necessarily follows that no two institutions can have exactly the same strategic planning process and benefit from it in the same manner. Strategic planning has to be situational. It has to be mission-oriented. The success of strategic planning should be measured by how well a given institution has accomplished its own stated institutional goals under all the internal and external environmental forces and constraints that it faces.

Strategic Planning Should Employ the Systems Approach. The concept of systems theory reflects "a set of interrelated parts designed to accomplish a goal or objective with the basic assumption that the total of the parts differs in significant respects from the parts taken separately and that the interaction of the parts is essential to accomplishing the mission" (Winstead and Ruff, p. 32). In the context of higher education, the systems approach would require that most departmental or individual matters be viewed at the institutional level, in light of all other pressing institutional priorities and problems. This is not to say that departmental matters are unimportant. Rather, in a time of uncertainty and financial constraints, they should ideally be viewed using the systems approach. In general, the systems approach is likely to encourage factional constituents to set aside their self-interests and to focus their attention on matters which are in the best interest of the institution as a whole. Intra-institutional understanding and cooperation is likely to be enhanced as a consequence of the process.

In some institutions, the systems approach may be difficult to employ due to problems associated with strong political interest groups, fluid participation among campus constituents, or what Birnbaum (1988) calls the "loose-coupling" effects of sub-subsystems within an institution. The concept of "loose-coupling" as explained by Birnbaum (1988, p. 38) refers to the "connection between organizational subsystems that may be infrequent, circumscribed, weak in their mutual effects, unimportant, or slow to respond." In a loosely-coupled campus, subsystems are usually autonomous units which are capable of detecting and responding to changes in the external environment without centralized coordination. The challenge in a strategic planning process is to be able to persuade loosely-coupled subsystems to work together and to adopt a common goal reality which works toward the benefit of the whole institution.

Strategic Planning Is A Process. As Keller (1983, p. 140) explains, "the idea is not to produce a fat, detailed document that everyone should follow but to get all the key people thinking innovatively and acting strategically, with the future in mind." Strategic planning should be understood to be an on-going process, not an end-product, and should not stop soon after an institutional masterplan or an accreditation self-study is completed. To be sure, planning documents are vital in guiding institutions through their chosen strategic paths, but strategic

planning has to be more. More critically, it has to include the continuing process of scanning the environment, deciding clear and realistic institutional goals, formulating appropriate programs, and monitoring institutional success.

Strategic Planning Should Be On-Going. Because environmental conditions change and institutions should change to accommodate them, it necessarily follows that strategic planning should be on-going. Strategic planning carried out by an ad hoc planning committee usually does not ensure continuity of the planning process. Strategic planning should become an important fixture of an institution, an integral institutional procedure. It should not occur as a separate activity away from the mainstream of institutional governance (MacKinney, 1984). The strategic planning process, in order for it to remain on-going, should be well-publicized and widely supported by all pertinent constituents, inside and outside the institution.

Strategic Planning Should Be Pro-Active. Strategic planning should be pro-active as opposed to being mostly reactive. A strategic planning process that is pro-active anticipates events, problems, and issues facing an institution and responds to them while still possible. Even better, a pro-active approach can dissuade institutions from relying on bottom-line approaches to decision making, such as the use of student enrollment, student aptitude test scores, endowment, faculty headcounts, or a yearly financial summary. Bottom-line approaches are at best temporary and sometimes superficial and may not deal adequately with the complexities of problems facing higher education.

Strategic Planning Should Consider the External Environment. Perhaps the most important ingredient of strategic planning is the consideration given to elements in the external environment. As explained earlier, the external environment is comprised of elements outside an institution but which can have direct or indirect effects on the institution. Environmental scanning is a process of detecting and analyzing the potential impacts of these elements. The intent of environmental scanning, as appropriately explained by Peterson (1986, p. 145) is "not to make plans or set goals but to provide a realistic picture of the external environment within which strategic planning takes place."

Strategic Planning Looks Into the Future. Predicting the future entails scanning the external environment for significant elements that can effect the general direction and future of institutions. To manage the future competently, institutions must choose a preferred future state by reconciling both their internal and external environments, and implementing appropriate programs to achieve that state. Quite clearly, any type of planning would be short-sighted if the future and long-range plans are ignored or missing.

Strategic Plans Should Be Prioritized. While an effective strategic planning process can produce many ideas and plans, institutional plans are difficult to manage unless they are prioritized. Peterson (1986) reminds us that priority setting is the key interface between planning and resource allocation. Although not mentioned, priority setting is also key to implementation. Without priorities, plans cannot be properly funded and implemented. The question to ask is, who decides these priorities?

Ideally, participants in the campuswide strategic planning process should assume the responsibility of setting priorities to institutional strategies or plans. However, such a task may be difficult to achieve in institutions in which political influence, territorial and empire-building forces, or problems of fluid participation and apathy are strong institutional constraints. Depending on the circumstance, it may be appropriate for an institutional administrator to come into the strategic planning process and manage the process of priority setting. Regardless of how it is done, it remains critical for participants in the planning process to maintain some sense of ownership of the planning process.

Strategic Planning Promotes Optimization. Optimization refers to a point at which institutions or departments have achieved the most favorable position relative to their effectiveness and efficiency in converting allocated human, physical, and financial resources to desired institutional outcomes. To monitor optimization, institutions, through their strategic planning processes, should continually examine the relationship between institutional inputs and institutional outputs. Outcomes information generated from the monitoring process can indicate not only levels of optimization but can also provide insights for the development of improvement and quality enhancement strategies. It is important to note, however, that optimization does not always involve money. Sometimes, optimization can be achieved by manipulating non-financial variables, such as changing certain organizational policies, administrative procedures, work behavior, and people's attitudes.

Strategic Planning Promotes Financial Vitality. The key to financial vitality is to keep institutional expenditures less than revenues. To ensure financial vitality, there needs to be an institutional understanding about how and why institutional resources are being utilized. Comprehensive budget analyses and costing studies are often needed to understand the complexities of resource allocation, cost variations, and resource management.

However, institutions and their strategic planning committees should be concerned with more, such as the development of cost-cutting measures, resource reallocation strategies, additional sources of financial support, and strategies to fund new and innovative programs even in a time of limited financial resources.

Strategic Planning Should Be Research-Based. While political influences and personal intuition can play a part in decision making, the rational approach is usually fostered in a strategic planning process. Various forms of data and research information are usually needed to supplement rational decisions. However, quantitative information cannot always provide absolute answers to complex problems. In some situations, intangible variables (such as an institution's traditions, values, and culture) may need to be considered as well. Most important of all, people are still needed to interpret quantitative information and to balance it with other forms of information. Keller (1983) explains it succinctly: "Quantification is provided mainly to enrich qualitative sagacity not replace it. The essence of academic strategy is decision making. And computers don't make decisions, people do" (p. 141).

Strategic Planning Should Be Linked to Budgeting and Implementation. "The budget is the plan" is a common claim among institutional planners. Strategic plans realistically cannot be successful unless they are properly funded. Even though budgeting is not usually an implicit function of strategic planning, it is an important factor because of its linkage to priority setting. Strategic planning committees can influence budgeting through their priority setting responsibility.

Like budgeting, the implementation of programs is not usually a responsibility of strategic planning but it is a vital institutional activity. Consequently, strategic planning committees should be responsible for monitoring the implementation process, that is evaluating the effectiveness of the administrative structure that has been used to administer programs and activities, and measuring the extent of institutional accomplishments.

Strategic Planning Is Incomplete Without Evaluation. Evaluation, usually the final step in the strategic planning process, has two phases. The first phase, as just described, is the process of evaluating how well institutions have achieved their own stated goals through all of their programs and activities. Evaluation results can reveal (1) the extent of institutional accomplishments, and/or (2) whether or not institutional goals are even realistically attainable. If the latter is true, discussions about possible goal changes and revisions should ensue in the next planning cycle. Outcomes information can also be very useful in guiding institutions and their various departments in their improvement and optimization efforts.

The second phase of evaluation is the process of evaluating the strategic planning process itself. How the process can be improved and whether or not the planning committee itself has achieved its own stated objectives are important questions to consider.

Benefits of Strategic Planning

From the discussion above, strategic planning appears to be a promising planning concept in part due to its comprehensiveness in covering critical areas affecting institutional performance and survivability. To reaffirm its usefulness, it may be important to list a few benefits of strategic planning likely to be experienced by institutions.

The first likely benefit is that strategic planning can provide a much desired conceptual framework for decision making (MacKinney, 1984; Morrison et al., 1984). A framework of this kind can serve several purposes. One is that it can provide an explicit understanding of how and why certain decisions are being made in an institution. Two is that it can give an impression of openness of the strategic planning process since most major institutional matters are essentially on the "table" for discussion. This may foster or at least give the impression that the institution is interested in a more democratic form of governance. Three is that it can reduce the occurrence of hidden agendas and preconceived planning linkages (such as a previously agreed upon arrangement linking student enrollment with budgeting). And four is that it can reduce the possibility of unbalanced influence by a personality or a powerful group of individuals.

The second likely benefit is that since strategic planning employs a systems approach, it can promote a better intra-institutional understanding and cooperation among campus constituents. Even in very large and complex institutions, "loosely-coupled subsystems" (using Birnbaum's terminology again) could conceivably be brought together to discuss good and bad ideas and to devise plans to improve or eliminate ineffective or defective components of the system, all for the common good of the institution.

The third likely benefit is that strategic planning can provide a means for institutions, especially those in precarious financial health, to cope with and survive the turbulent environment ahead. Strategic planning can assist these institutions in identifying potentially life-threatening adversities and how they are to be handled and overcome on a pro-active and longitudinal basis.

The fourth likely benefit is that the strategic planning can provide the necessary forum and means for institutions to rethink their missions and/or to clarify or adopt clearer ones. In many academic

organizations, as Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley (1978) have observed, goal ambiguity and uncertainty are common but goal ambiguity cannot assist institutions in their attempts to execute the "right" combinations of programs and activities to achieve institutional goals. Birnbaum (1988), however, has a different opinion. Birnbaum postulates that the problem is not that higher education cannot identify clear goals but rather it must simultaneously embrace a number of conflicting goals. Goals sometimes are difficult to clarify especially in large and complex institutions, according to Birnbaum, but the key is to "redefine management so that it can function usefully within a context of conflicting objectives" (1988, p. 12).

Even though unclear and conflicting goals may be commonplace and may not pose a threat to institutional survivability in some large and complex institutions, conflicting goals should ideally be kept to a minimum. But among the smaller, less complex, and less financially stable institutions, unclear and conflicting institutional goals can be a major impedance to institutional accomplishments and progress. For these institutions, strategic planning may assist in (1) the revision of unclear institutional goals so that the entire campus community can know exactly what they are or mean and can work together toward achieving them; or (2) the development of new goals if existing goals are obsolete or no longer desired.

The fifth likely benefit is that the strategic planning process can provide a more comprehensive and pro-active approach to decision making, thereby dissuading institutions from relying on "bottom-line" guidelines. As explained before, bottom-line approaches are at best temporary and may not deal adequately with complex issues and problems facing higher education. Complex problems need to be handled proactively and longitudinally, and strategic planning provides for both.

The sixth likely benefit is that strategic planning can improve the morale of a campus community. When campus constituents are allowed to participate in decision making, especially in matters affecting their own livelihood and well-being, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude about themselves and their institutions. Equally as important, participation can promote ownership of the planning process and its end products, which in turn can promote intra-institutional cooperation and can increase the likelihood of institutional accomplishments.

The seventh likely benefit is that strategic planning can improve the image of an institution, both internally and externally (Shirley, 1988). Because a strategic planning process often clarifies major institutional matters, people can feel more secure about themselves and the destiny of their institution. This positive feeling and image is likely to transfer outside the campus, to government officials, alumni groups, trustees, donors, philanthropic organizations, future students, and the general public. And an image of positivism and certainty may likely foster increased public interest and financial support for the institution (Morrison et al., 1984).

Pitfalls of Strategic Planning

While some likely benefits of strategic planning are identifiable, institutions wishing to initiate or improve their strategic planning processes should also note a few likely pitfalls.

First, it is important to realize that academic organizations by nature are difficult to manage and plan. Planning can be difficult because consensus is difficult to reach in an environment characterized by autonomy and decentralization. Two, since participation in many academic organizations is likely to be fluid, problems of drop-outs and apathy are difficult to resolve. A possible resolution may be to establish broad coalitions across campus and to reduce the cost of individual participation. Three, many institutions are not accustomed to managing reduction. Most are more experienced at managing expansion and growth. Four, daily operational and routine responsibilities tend to prevent institutions from assuming an "anticipatory" mode. Most institutions find themselves in a "reactive" or "fire-fighting" mode. And five, some traditional practices of higher education (like the yearly budgeting cycle) can impede the effectiveness of planning beyond one year. Quite clearly, to facilitate a more effective planning process, institutions should strive to remove all five stumbling blocks inasmuch as possible.

The second pitfall of strategic planning is likely to be an overemphasis on quantitative data and theories (Shirley, 1988). Theories sometimes may not work, and the "right" way may not always be the most practical. In addition, quantitative data and modeling may not provide wholistic solutions to complex issues and problems. Non-quantifiable dimensions of an institution (such as its traditions, cultures, and values) may be as important and may need to be combined with quantitative information to arrive at a more realistic understanding of a particular problem or issue. Most important of all, people are still needed to interpret information and to make "correct" decisions.

The third pitfall is likely to be a problem of overcoming inertia and fear of planning. Fear is quite understandable given that planning implies change and change raises feelings of loss, job insecurity, and worse (MacKinney, 1984). One possible way to reduce fear may be to remind people of the importance of planning, the consequences of not planning, and how their contribution to the

planning process will benefit them as well as their institution.

The fourth pitfall is likely to be the failure to inform pertinent internal and external constituents of the planning process (MacKinney, 1984; Shirley, 1988). Because campus constituents will ultimately be responsible for carrying out all institutional plans and decisions, they should always be kept informed of all planning decisions and what they would need to do in order to implement them. External constituents who have ultimate control over institutions (such as governing or coordinating boards, state legislators, the general public) should be especially kept informed as well. There should be no surprises when plans are presented for discussion, approval, budgeting, or implementation.

Fifth, because there is a urgent need to deal effectively with pressing environmental adversities, institutions may find themselves focusing too much attention on the external environment and not enough on the internal. All institutions should recognize the critical need to analyze and reconcile both environments since both are necessary to ensure institutional competitiveness and survivability.

And sixth, the misconception that strategic planning is as end-product should be clarified (MacKinney, 1984). People need to be reminded that a strategic planning process does not end with the completion of an institutional masterplan, self-study, or planning document. Among other things, it needs to monitor the implementation of programs and the extent to which these programs have contributed toward the accomplishment of institutional goals. Strategic planning also needs to be on-going and self-correcting, in the sense that adjustments should continually be made in the planning process itself.

Good Approaches to Strategic Planning

While there are some likely pitfalls to avoid in a strategic planning process, there are also a few good approaches to bear in mind.

The first good approach is to involve a good representation of the campus community in the strategic planning process. For some institutions, it may be a matter of resolving problems of apathy and fluid participation. For others, there may be a need to establish coalitions or to do precisely the opposite, that is, to resolve problems associated with strong political interest groups so that all constituents, weak and strong, can be heard. Representative participation in the strategic planning process is likely to enhance morale and can promote legitimacy and ownership of the planning process. It is often said that extensive campuswide participation is ideal and should be solicited but this is more or less a governance cliché. It is often impractical and sometime counterproductive to have a large number of campus constituents involved in a strategic planning process.

The second good approach is to persuade campus constituents to accept the strategic planning process. Their acceptance would be more likely if they were involved in one way or another in the planning process or if the end product--the strategic plan--reflected their inputs and concerns. If acceptance of strategic planning exists, people are more likely to believe in working together toward the accomplishment of common institutional goals.

The third good approach is to make sure that ample time and opportunities are allowed for people to exchange ideas freely and to discuss problems and issues facing them and their institutions. Because strategic planning works best when there is a reasonable amount of participation and acceptance, inputs from constituents should be sought, even if it may difficult and time-consuming to reach general consensus on certain issues. Some experts on planning have commented that the chief executive institution should not direct or even become a member of a planning committee. This way, the planning committee can more freely exchange ideas without structural constraints or fear of repercussions. Whether or not this is an appropriate arrangement should be dependent on each institution's unique circumstances.

The fourth good approach is that strategic planning should be viewed inasmuch as possible at the institutional level. There will be many discussions and arguments about departmental or individual goals and priorities, but the key is to view and interpret most matters at the institutional level. Encouraging campus constituents to think in the best interest of the institution as a whole is probably a good way of resolving many of their inter-departmental squabbles and of promoting intra-institutional cooperation and understanding.

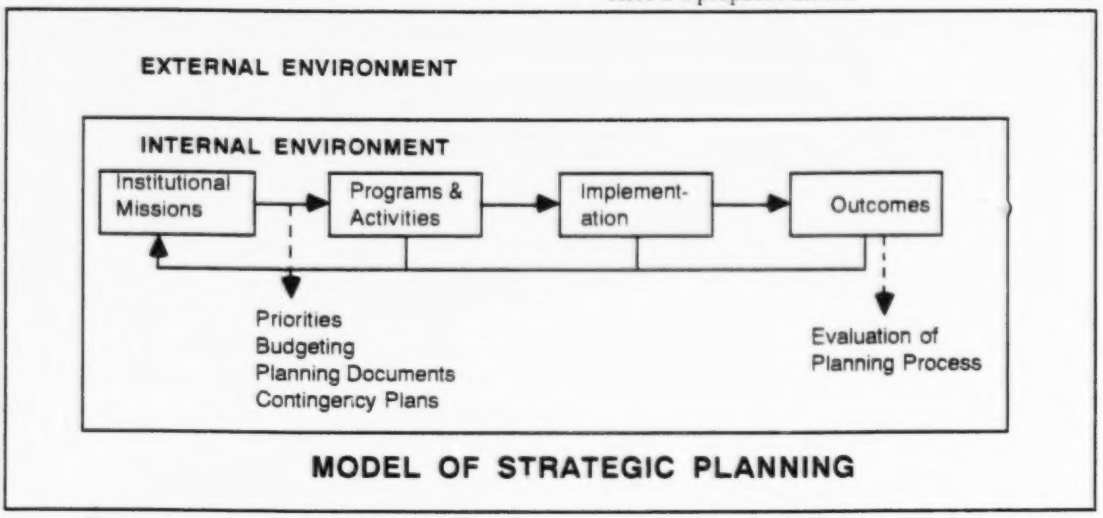
Finally, some planning experts have recommended that a strategic planning cycle be kept medium-term, between two to five years. One year is usually too short since strategic planning by nature is time-consuming. Any process longer than five years may be unrealistic because of rapidly changing external environmental conditions.

Concluding Remarks

This article has presented a case for the comprehensive nature of strategic planning and why it will remain an important planning concept for higher education for many years to come. What remains unclear however is a common definition of strategic planning. Given that strategic planning is situational and mission-oriented, a common definition may not be entirely possible or even necessary. To be sure, any definition would be incomplete if it did not include some of the key characteristics described in

this article. But by combining all key characteristics, including those used previously by other authors, it is possible to develop a comprehensive list of key elements pertinent to the understanding of strategic planning.

Here is a proposed model:



MODEL OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

The first key element of strategic planning appears to be the process of assessing an institution's internal environment, that is, assessing its traditions, culture, people, programs, facilities, financial resources, and strengths and weaknesses. The second essential element is the assessment of the external environment, that is, looking for and examining factors and conditions outside the institution that can affect the institution directly or indirectly. The third element is the process of reconciling both the internal and external environments and setting institutional goals reflecting the relative impacts of both. The process would need to be situational, on-going, dynamic, pro-active, future-oriented and research-based and should employ the systems approach. The fourth element appears to be the translation of institutional goals into programs and activities targeted specifically at achieving chosen institutional goals. The intermediary steps are priority setting and budgeting. Contingency plans may be necessary just in case scheduled plans do not produce desired results. A masterplan or a planning document may also be created listing all possible goals, programs, and contingency plans. The fifth essential element is the implementation of programs and activities by all appropriate campus constituents. The sixth element is the evaluation of the effectiveness of all programs and activities that have been targeted toward the achievement of stated institutional goals. The seventh element is the use of outcomes results for the improvement, better management, and optimization of institutional efforts. And finally but an often overlooked element is the establishment of an evaluation process for assessing the planning process itself. The planning cycle then repeats itself.

Even if strategic planning can be time-consuming and difficult to initiate, it may remain one of a few viable means by which higher education institutions can employ to forecast and manage the turbulent times ahead. At the very least, strategic planning gets a campus community actively involved in discussing its strengths, its problems, its future, and ways to manage it competently and survive.

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